

# South Moreland Avenue LCI Study

Funded through the  
ARC's Livable Centers Initiative Program



The City of Atlanta Bureau of Planning

**Final Report**

March 31, 2008

# Acknowledgements

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State Representative Robbin Shipp

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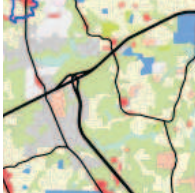
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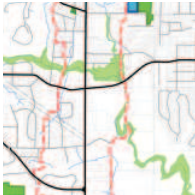
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This study is funded in part by the Livable Centers Initiative (LCI), a program offered by the Atlanta Regional Commission that encourages local jurisdictions to plan and implement strategies that link transportation improvements with land use development strategies to create sustainable, livable communities consistent with regional development policies.

## Plan's Response to LCI Goals

Here is a summary of how the Plan meets the goals of the LCI Program:

***Encourage a diversity of medium to high-density, mixed income neighborhoods, employment, shopping and recreation choices.***

- The plan identifies a number of key nodes along the Moreland Avenue corridor for mixed-use, medium to high-density development including the Thomasville Heights Housing Project Redevelopment, the Moreland Plaza commercial area, the Ormewood neighborhood commercial node, and the Glenwood node.
- Land use and zoning recommendations are included to encourage and guide the character and use of this development.

***Provide access to a range of travel modes including transit, roadways, walking and biking to enable access to all uses within the study area.***

- Major components of the plan are streetscape design and policy recommendations that seek to make Moreland Avenue a safer and pedestrian-friendly corridor.
- The plan recommends a network of new multi-use trails that provide enhanced north-south pedestrian connectivity in the corridor and connect existing parks (such as Brownwood Park) to proposed parks (such as Entrenchment Creek).
- The plan builds upon the City's Bicycle Plan by identifying additional bicycle routes and design policies to connect the corridor and surrounding neighborhoods to the city.

- Both short-term and long-term transit recommendations are proposed that include enhanced bus shelters and routes to future arterial transit such as light-rail or street car to connect the corridor to the BeltLine and MARTA rail system.

***Encourage integration of uses and land use policy/regulation with transportation investments to maximize the use of alternate modes.***

- The proposed redevelopment sites are specifically planned and designed to be higher-density, mixed-use sites that support jobs and housing, making them more transit supportive, walkable and less dependent on the automobile.
- The larger redevelopment sites are designed to require new streets and connections that structure development on a street and block system that adds to the area's transportation network, encourages small and walkable blocks, and distributes traffic to manage impact.

***Through transportation investments increase the desirability of redevelopment of land served by existing infrastructure.***

- The proposed redevelopment sites along the South Moreland Avenue Corridor are served by existing infrastructure. The new street connections and pedestrian enhancements will serve to connect these sites to the surrounding neighborhoods and maximize their ability to utilize the existing transportation infrastructure.
- Major underutilized redevelopment sites in the corridor include the Moreland Plaza commercial center and the Thomasville Heights Housing projects (currently being demolished). The proposed transportation investments will serve to help catalyze these valuable development opportunities.

***Preserve the historical characteristics and create a community identity.***



# Executive Summary

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- The proposed Model Development Standards were developed by the community to define the important characteristics of new development that when built would fit into the existing neighborhood and commercial character of the area.
- The development of Entrenchment Creek as a new park and open space serves to take an undervalued and ignored community asset and transform it into one of the area's most unique places.

## ***Develop a community-based transportation investment program that will identify capital projects, which can be funded in the annual TIP.***

- Through the public process a number of transportation projects have been identified that both enhance the quality-of-life and livability of the corridor, and increase connectivity and transportation alternatives; all of which are eligible for TIP funding.

## ***Provide transportation infrastructure incentives for jurisdictions to take local actions to implement the resulting study goals.***

- The LCI implementation funding opportunities will serve as an important incentive to implement the project identified.
- These improvements in the long-term will also provide an important signal to local land owners and developers about the City's and County's commitment to quality development in the corridor. This coupled with the design and land use regulations will ensure both public and private "implementation" of the plan.

## ***Provide for the implementation of the RDP policies, quality growth initiatives and Best Development Practices in the study area and at the regional level.***

- The plan specifically recommends the kind of mixed-use (jobs and housing), walkable and

transit supportive development in the South Moreland Avenue corridor that ARC is intending to promote. The physical infrastructure projects (pedestrian enhancements, trails, new streets, etc.) along with the land use and design policy will serve to begin implementation.

- Develop a local planning outreach process that promotes the involvement of all stakeholders particularly low income, minority and traditionally underserved populations.
- The public planning process has included; design workshops at three different local churches to promote as wide a range of participation as possible, a variety of smaller NPU and neighborhood organization meeting updates, regular Advisory Committee meetings, broader public meetings, informational posters distributed to local businesses, churches and schools, and public mailing notifications of the process.
- Over 300 people have attended the variety of meetings and workshops.

## ***Provide planning funds for development of the corridor that showcase the integration of land use policies/regulations and transportation investments with urban design tools.***

- This LCI process with the local funding support of the City of Atlanta, has served to identify projects and policies for the South Moreland Avenue Corridor that will implement and ARC's LCI goals.

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## Project Priorities:

A clear message expressed throughout this planning process from the community is the desire to enhance the livability of the South Moreland Avenue Corridor and surrounding neighborhoods through policies and projects that: makes it more multimodal (walking, cycling, transit, and cars), supports mixed use development, and includes stronger private development standards to promote pedestrian-friendly urban form.

The projects and priorities that have resulted are organized in several key areas. Provided here is a summary and highlight of the plan's project and priorities.

**Traffic** – The impact of traffic on the livability of the corridor is the single most identified concern of area residents. The community outreach process identified safety, health and quality-of-life concerns to high traffic volumes, high observed traffic speeds, and a high proportion of heavy truck traffic along Moreland Avenue.

- The plan recommends streetscape and pedestrian crossing projects designed to help calm traffic in the corridor, and manage the speed and behavior to both car and truck traffic, and enhance livability by mitigating some of the adverse visual, noise, and safety impacts of Moreland Avenue's traffic conditions.
- It is the expressed desire of the South Moreland Avenue community and Advisory Committee to have the City of Atlanta, DeKalb County and the Georgia Department of Transportation review their policies related to heavy-duty, through truck traffic on corridors, such as Moreland Avenue, relative to the health and livability impacts on adjacent neighborhoods due to truck traffic, and in particular the cumulative health effects of diesel exhaust particulate. This will require additional study, and involve the cooperation of City, County, and State-level elected officials working with the Georgia Department of Transportation and the Public Health community, to identify policy options that can be implemented.

**Intersections** – Several key intersections were identified as being barriers and traffic issues in the corridor.

- The I-20 interchange is a barrier for pedestrians and cyclists north-south. The proposed reconfiguration provides a potential solution that provides safer pedestrian access and more accessible vehicular access.
- Both the Glenwood Avenue and Skyhaven Road intersections were identified as traffic and safety problems based on their off-set configuration. The plan recommends the realignment of these intersections creating better east-west connectivity and increasing traffic capacity on Moreland Avenue.

**Pedestrian Crossings** – Moreland Avenue itself is a significant pedestrian barrier given the speed and volume of traffic and its 4-lane width.

- The plan recommends a series of new pedestrian crossings (signalized and unsignalized) throughout the corridor to create safer and more regular pedestrian crossings. Where space allows, these crossings are designed with landscaped islands that promote traffic calming and provide a pedestrian refuge.

**New Street Network** – There are several large redevelopment opportunities along the corridor that can and should accommodate new street network. These new connections will serve to provide added transportation capacity in the corridor, create smaller, walkable blocks, and reconnect these large sites to the surrounding neighborhoods.

- Key among these are "Entrenchment Creek Parkway" a north-south street that could connect McDonough Boulevard to Custer Avenue creating a parallel route to Moreland Avenue.

**Transit** – Connecting the corridor with enhanced transit opportunities is a key goal identified by the community.

- The plan recommends in the short-term new and enhanced bus shelters along existing routes and the potential to reevaluate existing bus routes and timing to better serve the area.

# Executive Summary



*View of proposed streetscape and pedestrian crossing on Moreland Avenue*

- In addition, long term recommendations include fixed arterial transit (light rail or street car) along Moreland Avenue that connects it to the BeltLine and MARTA system.

**Pedestrian Enhancements & Streetscape** – The plan focuses on pedestrian improvements along Moreland Avenue and in the surrounding neighborhoods.

- The plan recommends widened sidewalks and enhanced streetscape along all portions of Moreland Avenue.
- In addition, the plan identifies new sidewalks on adjacent neighborhood streets that are currently without sidewalks.

**Open Space, Trails & Greenways** – The area includes several unique open space and trail opportunities.

- Entrenchment Creek Park is a valuable open space opportunity in a floodplain area that is undevelopable. This enhanced open space would serve as a catalyst for adjacent redevelopment and provide a significant recreational resource.
- A number of new trails are proposed along creek corridors that would connect to the future BeltLine Trail, Entrenchment Creek Park, and the future trail systems in DeKalb County.

**Bicycle Routes** – The area includes a strong and active cycling community that desires a safer system of routes and facilities to connect to the City's existing system.

- The plan identifies new route opportunities and facility policies to create safe and attractive cycling routes and promote bicycle use as a viable transportation alternative.



# Executive Summary



*Proposed Entrenchment Creek Park (View from Moreland Avenue Bridge)*

**Land Use** – The plan identifies critical future land use changes necessary to promote the proposed redevelopment and open space recommendations.

- These include changing much of the current “low density commercial” use along the corridor to “mixed- use”, and changing selected and focused residential areas from “single family residential” to “low density residential” to allow for townhome type redevelopment in key areas along the corridor.
- In the unincorporated DeKalb County section of the study, changing the Moreland Plaza site from “suburban residential” to “town center” to promote mixed use redevelopment.

**Quality of Life Design Character** – Throughout the corridor there is a need to enhance the design and site planning standards for future redevelopment.

- The plan recommends the use of the City’s Quality-of-Life zoning categories in order to implement the pedestrian-oriented design standards.
- In addition, the plan outlines “model development standards” that the community has developed in order to help regulate future mixed-use redevelopment projects.



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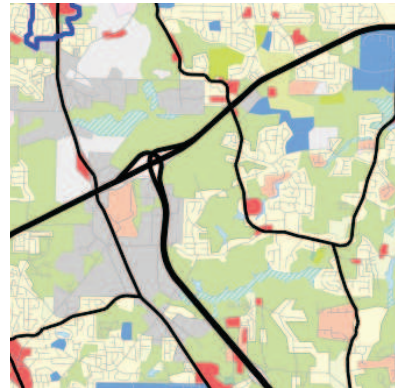


*View of redeveloped Thomasville Heights along Moreland Avenue*

**Housing** – The community identified the need and desire to promote a mix of housing that accommodates affordable workforce housing, opportunities for senior housing, and a range of housing types that create diversity in the corridor.

- The plan identified and designed concepts for key redevelopment sites that illustrate how a range of housing types and product could be accommodated (specifically for the Moreland Plaza and Thomasville Heights Housing project sites) with land use and zoning recommendations to support a range of use (City's Quality-of-Life Districts).
- The corridor is eligible to utilize the City's Renewal Communities Program (RC) and Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ) Programs to incentivize the inclusion of workforce housing in redevelopment projects.
- In addition, the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA) plans to redevelop the Thomasville Heights Housing Project as a mixed-income neighborhood with workforce housing opportunities.





# Section 1.0

## Background

## **Overview of the LCI Program**

The Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) is a program offered by the Atlanta Regional Commission that encourages local jurisdictions to plan and implement strategies that link transportation improvements with land use development strategies to create sustainable, livable communities consistent with regional development policies. The LCI program is intended to promote greater livability, mobility and development alternatives in existing employment center, town centers and corridors. The rationale is that directing development towards areas with existing infrastructure will benefit the region and minimize sprawling land use patterns.

Funding for study projects are awarded on a competitive basis to local governments and non-profit sponsors for producing plans to define future center development strategies and supporting public and private investments. ARC funded 67 planning studies in the first seven years of the LCI program (in 2000 to 2006).

### ***Key Goals for the LCI Study***

The LCI program was established with ten goals that can be summarized as three general concepts that encourage mixed land use, transportation options, and public involvement.

1. Encourage a diversity of residential neighborhoods, employment, shopping and recreation choices at the activity center and town center level; housing should be given strong focus to create mixed-income neighborhoods and support the concept of “aging in place”;
2. Provide access to a range of travel modes including transit, roadways, walking and biking to enable access to all uses within the study area; and,
3. Develop an outreach process that promotes the involvement of all stakeholders (including those not often involved in such planning efforts).

Every LCI study is expected to address these three key concepts as a part of the planning process and eventually identify projects for implementation which can be funded under the LCI program with matching contributions from local jurisdictions.

## **The South Moreland Avenue LCI Study Background & Purpose**

In 2001, the Southstar Community Development Corporation (CDC) undertook a study to analyze a portion of the Moreland Avenue Corridor. To further some of the design concepts and ideas that emerged from that study, Southstar CDC along with the City of Atlanta applied for the LCI funding grant in late 2006 for the South Moreland Avenue corridor with an expanded study area from I-20 to Constitution Road. Local matching funds were sourced from the City of Atlanta through Council members Carla Smith and Natalyn Archibong representing Council Districts 1 and 5 respectively.

### ***The Planning Process***

The planning process for this study was designed to inform the public visioning and guide the development of recommendations. It began with an existing conditions analysis that served to identify critical needs, issues and opportunities. For this study, the existing conditions analysis was focused on transportation, land use and redevelopment issues. In addition, a Market Analysis was conducted for the study area which served to outline the scale and type of potential future development and identify obstacles and opportunities to redevelopment. The complete Existing Conditions Analysis is described in detail in Section 2.0 of this report.

The public visioning process (described in detail in Section 3.0) served to focus and direct the identification and design of specific projects and long-term strategies for the corridor based upon the issues and opportunities uncovered. A multi-day design workshop was used to bring the planning team and public together in a focused planning and design exercise. This workshop served as a way to quickly assimilate the various planning and design issues into a draft set of concepts and recommendations. Following the workshop, the planning team continued to refine the recommendations with input from the Advisory Committee in order to prepare the final plan and recommendations (Section 4.0) and implementation plan (Section 5.0).



# Background

## Study Area for Moreland Avenue LCI

This study is focused on Moreland Avenue from just north of I-20 to just north of Constitution Road. The study area itself extends a quarter mile on either side of the corridor into the neighborhoods along Moreland Avenue.

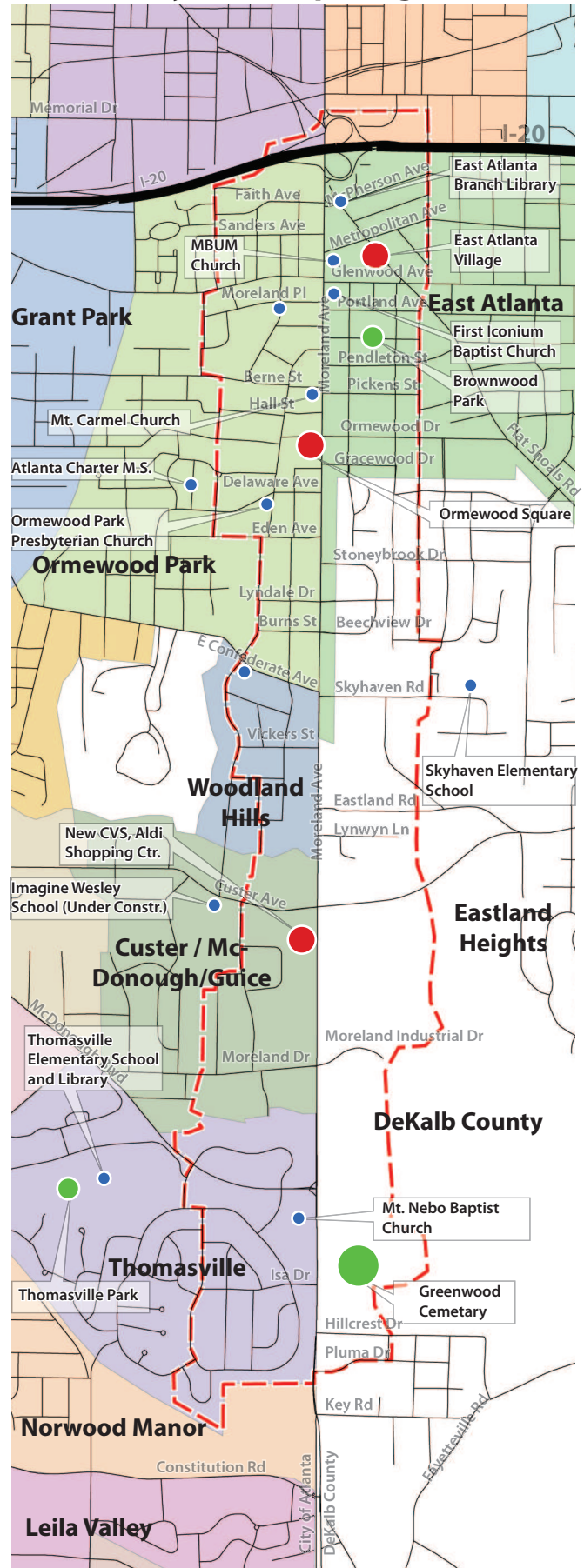
Some of the key neighborhoods within the study area include:

- Ormewood
- East Atlanta
- Eastland Heights
- Woodland Hills
- Custer/McDonough neighborhood
- Thomasville Heights and the Thomasville neighborhood
- Norwood Manor neighborhood

The study area is in the proximity of culturally diverse mix of destinations.

- The East Atlanta village retail district
- The East Atlanta Village Farmer's Market
- The East Atlanta Branch Library
- A number of churches including the Martha brown united Methodist Church, the First Iconium Baptist Church, the Ormewood Park Presbyterian Church, the Mt. Nebo Baptist Church and others.
- Parks - Brownwood Park, Thomasville Park and a few other neighborhood pocket parks. Besides the area is in close proximity to Grant Park, Zoo Atlanta, and the East Lake YMCA.

## Study Area Map: Neighborhoods



### Legend

- Neighborhoods
- Study Area
- Institutional Nodes
- Retail Nodes
- Key parks and Open Spaces



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## **Study Area Jurisdictions for Moreland Avenue LCI**

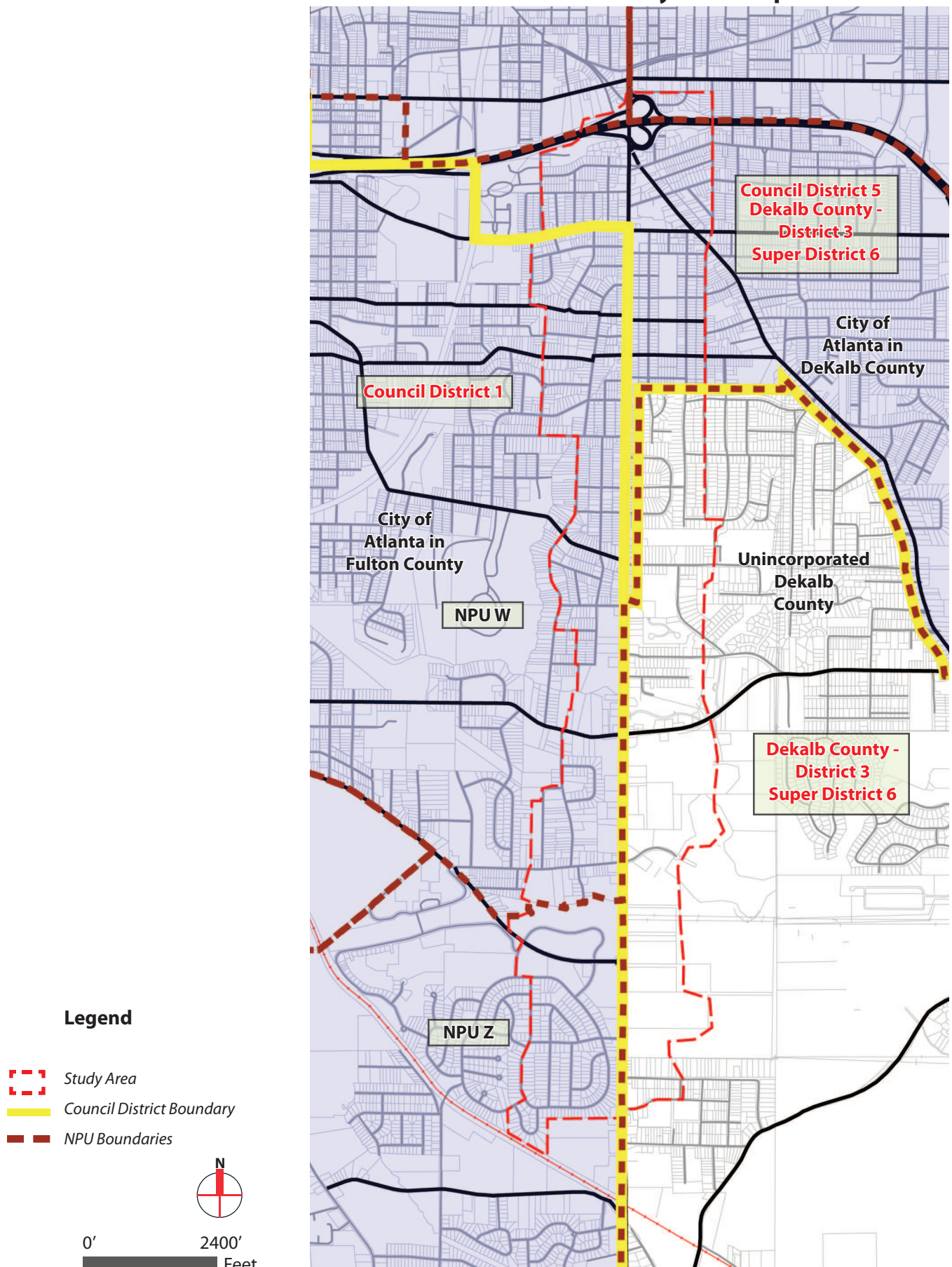
Moreland Avenue is the boundary between Fulton and DeKalb County. The study area within Fulton County lies within the City of Atlanta and includes a large portion of NPU W and a smaller portion of NPUs Z.

The area east of Moreland Ave. is a part of the City of Atlanta, but lies in DeKalb County. Within the study area limits, it includes the neighborhoods around Brownwood Park and the East Atlanta Village. This area is represented by both, the council members from the City as well as representatives from DeKalb County.

All of the study area in the City of Atlanta jurisdiction falls under Council Districts 1 & 5, represented by Council Members Carla Smith and Natalyn Archibong respectively.

The Dekalb County portion of the study area is a part of District 3 represented by Commissioner Larry Johnson and Superdistrict 6 represented by Commissioner Kathie Gannon

## Study Area Map: Jurisdictions



## **Regional Context of Moreland Avenue**

The adjacent map provides a view of Moreland Avenue in context of Southeast Atlanta's land use and transportation patterns. It highlights the land use transition from historic urban neighborhoods located in close proximity of downtown to the first ring suburban neighborhoods of Grant Park, Ormewood and East Atlanta, to the emerging suburban residential developments in south-west Dekalb County, and the strong industrial development strategically located close to the I-285 corridor.

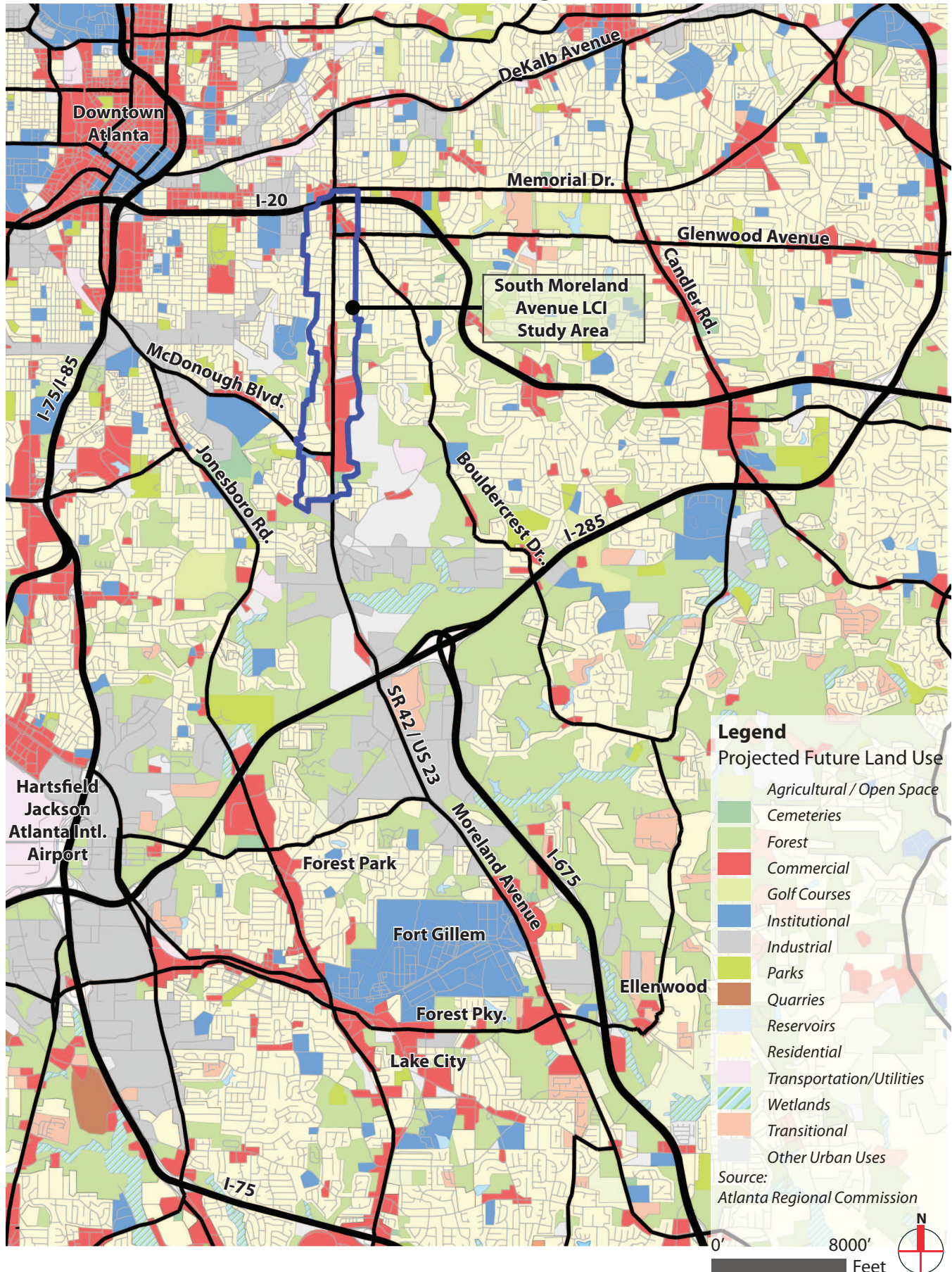
In a transportation role Moreland Avenue forms a key artery that:

- Connects I-20 with I-285
- Extends beyond I-285 and acts an alternate route to I-675
- Acts as an alternate route to I-75 for suburban south-east Atlanta neighborhoods

It connects origins – in-town residential neighborhoods and suburban neighborhoods in South-west DeKalb and North Clayton counties, with destinations – industrial employment centers near I-285, Fort Gillem, employment and retail centers in the East Atlanta and Downtown Atlanta. Thus the regional mobility function of Moreland Avenue puts pressure on the study area located closer in-town. The key issue for the study will be to recognize the transitioning nature of the corridor as it becomes a part of the urban street network and balancing regional mobility goals with local neighborhood preservation goals.



## Regional Context of Moreland Avenue





## Truck Route Policies

Truck routes provide access for freight movement to and from industrial areas. The City of Atlanta Municipal Code and Official truck Route map identifies officially designated truck routes. The entirety of Moreland Avenue, from Ponce de Leon Ave to the City Limits is designated as a truck route.

Moreland Avenue (State Route 42, US Route 23) is a part of the state route system and therefore is also considered to be a truck route under the jurisdiction of the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT).

The Atlanta Strategic Action Plan (ASAP) outlines the City's desire to retain existing industrial land uses for reasons of economic development, tax revenue and employment; businesses in industrial areas require good truck access. The ASAP also seeks to maintain and improve accessibility and connectivity for in-city and through-city freight traffic, provided that the City's residents and businesses are not unreasonably impacted by freight-related traffic, noise or air-pollution. Any changes to truck designated routes must carefully balance the needs of all stakeholders including residents and businesses.

The Connect Atlanta Plan, the City's first comprehensive transportation plan, is an ongoing study to address the City's transportation challenges and their relation to land use and the quality of life. The Connect Atlanta Plan will examine the issue of truck routes in the city and develop a policy on truck routing through work with GDOT, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) as well as the City's Department of Public Works and County agencies. The Connect Atlanta Plan is expected to be adopted by City Council in the last quarter of 2008.

DeKalb County's Comprehensive Transportation, currently in its final approval stages, identifies Moreland Avenue within the study area as a designated Truck Route.

Any change to the current status of Moreland Avenue as a designated truck route, or additional restrictions or limits to the operations of trucks, would require legislative and administrative action at the local, county and state level, including changes to city,

county and state-wide transportation, industrial, and land-use policies. Such changes would have to be considered not only in the context of these policies, but also as part of a city and region-wide study to determine alternative routes.

### City of Atlanta municipal code pertaining to truck routes:

Sec. 150-237. Restricted vehicles required to use truck routes; exceptions. All motor vehicles having a gross weight in excess of 36,000 pounds, including the load, or having an overall length in excess of 30 feet, except vehicles designed to carry passengers, are prohibited from using any street within the city, except those streets authorized by ordinance and designated as truck routes, except when:

- (1) The terminal, parking lot, repair garage or headquarters of the restricted motor vehicle is not on a designated truck route, ingress to and egress from those places shall be made by the most direct route available between the terminal, parking lot, repair garage or headquarters and nearest designated truck route;
- (2) A delivery or pickup is to be made at a location which is not on a designated truck route and not within the area bounded by Baker Street on the north, Courtland Street and Washington Street on the east, Memorial Drive and Garnett Street on the south and Spring Street on the west, exclusive of the boundary streets, ingress to and egress from that location shall be made by the most direct route available between that location and the nearest designated truck route; and
- (3) A delivery or pickup is to be made by a truck tractor, road tractor, combination truck tractor semitrailer or combination road tractor-trailer at a location which is within the area of the city bounded on the north by Baker Street, on the east by Courtland Street and Washington Street, on the south by Memorial Drive and Garnett Street and on the west by Spring Street, exclusive of the boundary streets, the delivery or pickup shall not be made between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. (Code 1977, § 13-2378)



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